Utah Department of Health

News Release

For Immediate Release
April 12, 2006
Media Contacts:
Libbey Chuy
Health Program Specialist
801-538-6441

Utah Leading the Way into the Genomics Era

Leaders prepare Utah to use genetics to prevent and treat asthma

(Salt Lake City, UT) –Will there soon be new personalized medicine for those with asthma? Will family health history enable health care workers to more easily diagnose the disease? How will genomics impact individuals, families and the society at large? The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and Utah Asthma Task Force today led the nation by convening a first-of-its-kind workshop to discuss questions similar to these.

The one-day "Asthma's Future in Utah: How Will Genomics Play a Role?" workshop brought together educators, policymakers, industrial hygienists, nurses, respiratory therapists and other health professionals to build on Utah's rich history of using genetics and family history in health care.

Kristina Marsh, a 26-year-old with asthma is hopeful for the future of genomics and the outcome of the workshop due to a lifetime of difficulties managing her own asthma. "I really believe that genomics is the future of medicine but especially asthma," Marsh said. "It might mean that there would someday be a controller medication that works well for me. It might also mean saving years of trial-and-error and frequent trips to the emergency room."

The promises of the genomics era have left leaders in health care, education and government to wonder how knowledge of genetics will be used in the prevention and treatment of common diseases like asthma. The workshop focused on how pharmacogenomics, family health history, and the ethical, legal and social issues surrounding genomics can be integrated into state asthma activities.

- More -

Workshop speakers ranged from local experts to respected national leaders in their fields, including:

- Paul Ray, Utah House of Representatives (ethical, legal and social issues)
- Jeffrey R. Botkin, MD, MPH, Associate Vice President for Research Integrity, University of Utah (ethical, legal and social issues)
- Wayne Anderson, PhD, Director, GlaxoSmithKline Respiratory Disease Genetics (pharmacogenomics or personalized medicine)
- Marc S. Williams, MD, FAAP, FACMG, Director, Intermountain Health Care Clinical Genetics Institute (genomics)
- Paul Eberle, Department of Respiratory Care, Weber State University (family health history)

Workshop attendees produced a work plan for how genomics will be integrated into asthma activities in Utah. A draft of the work plan is expected to be released by July 2006.

Utah data indicates approximately 9 percent of people in Utah have asthma, up from approximately 5 percent in 2001. Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases affecting children in the United States and often causes repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing that can interrupt daily activities for those with asthma. Although there is no known cure, asthma symptoms can generally be controlled. For those interested in more information about asthma and genomics, visit www.health.utah.gov/asthma/genomics.html.

# # #

The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.